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## Speech-Act Verbs and the Ditransitive Construction \*

Hiromitsu Akashi

### 1. Introduction

It is generally observed that in English the prepositional-dative form, [NP<sub>1</sub> V NP<sub>2</sub> to/for NP<sub>3</sub>], and the ditransitive counterpart, [NP<sub>1</sub> V NP<sub>2</sub> NP<sub>3</sub>], alternate with each other. This phenomenon is what is called the “dative alternation.” However, as shown in the following examples, not all verbs allow this alternation (see Green 1974, Oehrle 1976, Pinker 1989, Gropen et al. 1989, Goldberg 1992, 1995, Levin 1993, among others).

- (1) a. Ellen told a story to Helen.  
b. Ellen told Ellen a story.
- (2) a. Heather cabled the news to Sara.  
b. Heather cabled Sara the news.
- (3) a. Susan whispered the news to Rachel.  
b. \*/?ok Susan whispered Rachel the news.
- (4) a. Ellen said something to Helen.  
b. \* Ellen said Helen something.

While the verbs *tell* and *cabl* are compatible with both forms (I will call these verbs “dativizable verbs”), *say* and *whisper* are incompatible with the ditransitives somehow, and are not allowed to appear in this form (henceforth “non-dativizable verbs”).<sup>1</sup> This fact suggests that verbs differ as to whether or not they can alternate between two forms (I will borrow Pinker’s (1989) term and henceforth call this problem the “verb-by-verb choosiness”).

The main purpose of this paper is to propose some semantic criteria that actually work in distinguishing dativizable and non-dativizable verbs, focusing mainly on “speech-act verbs” like *tell* and *say*. I will argue that the notion which I call “goal-orientedness” plays a decisive role in explaining the reason why *tell* dativize, as shown in (1), whereas *say* does not, as in (4), for example. Given that the degree of goal-

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<sup>1</sup> The term “dativizable (non-dativizable) verb” is used in Pinker (1989), meaning that they can(not) participate in the dative alternation. For want of a better term, I would like to borrow his

orientedness is determined by whether or not a verb lexicalizes Goal (in the case of speech-act verbs, the addressee), it can be assumed that only strong goal-oriented verbs are allowed to enter into the ditransitive construction. I will show that this assumption makes it possible to give a clear account of the problem of verb-by-verb choosiness relevant to speech-act verbs.

This paper is organized as follows. Section 2 examines two previous analyses: Pinker (1989) and Wierzbicka (1988). Although I basically accept Wierzbicka's approach, I claim that both analyses cannot give a sufficient explanation of the problem in question. Section 3 presents my own analysis. Section 4 makes concluding remarks.

## 2. Previous Analyses

Speech-act verbs are verbs that describe communicative events (that is, transferring messages or ideas to someone else) and the situation described by these verbs involves at least three participants: the speaker, the addressee, and the message.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, these verbs have been usually classified into the following verb classes (cf. Gropen et al. 1989, Pinker 1989, Levin 1993):<sup>3</sup>

- (5) a. verbs of type of communicated message  
*tell, show, ask, teach, pose, write, spin, read, quote, cite...*
- b. verbs of instrument of communication  
*radio, E-mail, telegraph, wire, telephone, netmail, fax...*
- c. \* verbs of manner of speaking  
*shout, scream, murmur, whisper, shriek, yodel, yell, bellow, grunt...*
- d. \* verbs of proposition and propositional attitudes  
*say, assert, questioned, claim, doubt...*

As (5) shows, speech-act verbs face the problem of verb-by-verb choosiness (the use of the asterisk indicates that verbs belonging to this class are non-alternating verbs); only the upper two classes are said to allow the dative alternation, although the verbs in (5) all seem to describe communicative events. Taking this point into consideration, I will take up *tell*, *say*, and *shout* as representatives of the verb classes (5a), (5c), and (5d) respectively, and examine them in detail. As for verbs of

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term in this paper.

<sup>2</sup> I agree that there are more relevant participants besides these. In fact, many researchers propose their own roles associated with speech-act verbs (Dirven et al. 1982, Dixon 1992, Izutsu 2000, among others). However, it is sufficient to point out only these three for the purpose of this paper.

<sup>3</sup> Although the verb classifications and the labels of each verb class differ slightly among researchers, I will follow the classification of Gropen et al. (1989). This choice does not give rise to a serious problem.

instrument of communication, I will not deal with this verb class in this paper. It seems difficult to analyze verbs belonging to this class at this point, since this verb class is considered to be a relatively new dativizable class, and acceptability varies among verbs and speakers. Before entering into my analysis, I take up two previous analyses, Pinker (1989) and Wierzbicka (1988), and see how they deal with the problem of verb-by-verb choosiness.

### 2.1. *Pinker (1989)*

Taking a lexical semantic approach, Pinker argues that the ditransitive and prepositional-dative forms are related via the alternation between two semantic structures associated with each verb.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, according to Pinker, what gives rise to the alternation is the lexical rule specific to the dative alternation. This lexical rule acts directly on the semantic structures and changes an old (input) semantic structure to a new (output) one. Since a semantic structure is mapped onto a verb's argument structure via the application of general linking rules, the change of semantic structures automatically brings about the change of argument structures (as for general linking rules, see Pinker 1989: section 3.3.3).

Within the above mechanism for the dative alternation, the problem of verb-by-verb choosiness can be equated with that of how to restrict the application of the lexical rule. Then, what criteria preclude the lexical rule from applying to non-dativizable verbs? According to Pinker, one of them is that the lexical rule does not apply to a semantic structure of a verb whose meaning is incompatible with the "change of possession" sense. For example, a verb like *give* is allowed to alternate, since it has this sense by definition, whereas a verb like *laugh* is not, since *laughing* cannot be construed as a means of causing a change of possession in any cases. We can understand that this criterion functions as a necessary condition for the alternation in light of the fact that *laugh* is precluded from entering into not only the ditransitive form (*\*I laughed him a news*), but also the prepositional-dative form (*\*I laughed a news to him*). That is, verbs which fail to satisfy this criterion have no possibility of participating in the alternation to start with.

The criterion above certainly works as a necessary condition, but not as a sufficient condition. There are many verbs that seem to potentially involve the change of possession sense but in fact do not participate in the alternation (e.g., *say*,

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<sup>4</sup> The term "semantic structure" refers to "an autonomous level of linguistic representation, not reducible to syntax or cognition" (Pinker 1989: 357). This representation can be roughly identified to a certain aspect of a verb's meaning associated with syntax. In the case of the dative alternation, the semantic structures linked with the prepositional-dative and ditransitive forms are "X causes Y to go to Z" and "X causes Z to have Y," respectively. In these semantic structures, Y corresponds to the moving entity and Z to the possessor of the moving entity.

*shout, whisper*, etc). As for sufficient conditions, Pinker assumes that the lexical rule is sensitive to certain aspects of the meaning of verbs and applies only to verbs that fall within narrowly defined verb classes. In this connection, recall the dativizable and non-dativizable distinction among the verb classes shown in (5). According to Pinker, only (5a) and (5b) can be taken as belonging to narrowly defined verb classes, although the verbs in (5) all satisfy the “change of possession” criterion. Then, what semantic aspects differentiate dativizable verbs from non-dativizable ones? First of all, by comparing verbs of type of communicated message (*tell*) and verbs of proposition and propositional attitudes (*say*), Pinker claims that the two verbs are distinguished from each other on the basis of which semantic property they carry: “illocutionary force” or “speaker’s propositional attitude.” While *tell* has illocutionary force, *say* has no such property but rather specifies the speaker’s propositional attitude with respect to the truth of the content. Since the former, but not the latter, can participate in the alternation, the lexical rule is sensitive to illocutionary force and it is actually applied only to verbs that involve this property in their semantics. Secondly, as for the contrast between verbs of type of communicated message (*tell*) and verbs of manner of speaking (*shout*), Pinker claims that the crucial point is whether a verb lexicalizes some manner in which the speaker sends the message to the addressee. For example, *tell* does not seem to mind its manner since we can tell something to someone in various ways. Verbs of manner of speaking verbs, on the other hand, do lexicalize their own manners, which can be easily understood from the name of this verb class. Thus, what prevents the lexical rule from applying to non-dativizable verbs in this case is a semantic aspect “manner of motion.” To summarize the discussion so far, as for speech-act verbs, Pinker claims that “speaker’s propositional attitude” and “manner of motion” serve as semantic criteria for the application of the lexical rule. The lexical rule minds these properties and does not apply to verbs that have either of them. Besides cases in which verbs are clearly incompatible with the “change of possession” sense, Pinker claims that these two semantic properties determine whether a verb can participate in the dative alternation.<sup>5</sup>

Let us now move on to problems with Pinker’s proposal. General problems with his analysis have been discussed by many linguists (Goldberg 1995, Rosen 1996, van der Leek 1997, etc), but I will discuss here those relevant to speech-act verbs.

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<sup>5</sup> Notice also that certain morphophonological constraints are adopted in Pinker’s proposal. Pinker argues that English native speakers are sensitive to verbs with particular morphemes, such as *re-*, *pre-*, *trans-*, *-fer*, *-plain*, etc, and polysyllabic verbs with non-initial stress, so these verbs cannot occur in the ditransitive construction. For detailed discussion, see Pinker (1989): sections 2.1 and 4.4.1.1.

First of all, Pinker's proposal seems to be problematic in that a semantic property like "propositional attitudes" can account for only speech-act verbs; we do not want to set up an ad hoc criterion just to explain a specific verb class. As far as our attempt is to give a unitary account of the phenomenon of the dative alternation, it is most desirable to offer a single criterion that effectively circumscribes all dativizable verbs. In particular, as for *tell* and *say*, we must say that Pinker's analysis is too intuitive and also insufficient. As Pinker himself admits, he tentatively classifies these two verbs into the different classes in order to explain the fact that they differ as to dativizability, and also does not provide enough evidence to support his claim. Although I agree that Pinker correctly points out some semantic differences between the dativizable and non-dativizable verbs at issue, my point is that his criteria appear not to be the decisive ones for determining dativizability. There remains a challenge to explore an alternative.

## 2.2. Wierzbicka (1988)

Wierzbicka argues that the ditransitive construction has its specific meaning and the compatibility between the meaning of a verb and that of the construction determines dativizability, which is akin to the idea of Construction Grammar (cf. Goldberg 1995). An important point in her approach, however, is that the construction implies "a hierarchy of interest," and dativizability is determined in terms of this hierarchy. According to Wierzbicka, the ditransitive construction forces the target person (i.e., Goal) to be focused upon above the patient (i.e., Theme). She claims that "[t]he internal dative (i.e., the ditransitive construction) indicates that the speaker views the T (i.e., target person) as crucially involved in the situation, and as significantly affected by the action" (p. 376, brackets mine). Let us take *tell* and *announce* for example and see how Wierzbicka explains the data. As for dativizability, the former is allowed to occur in the construction (*Jim told his parents the news*), while the latter is not (*\*Jim announced his parents the news*). If we follow Wierzbicka, we must say that compared with *tell*, *announce* focuses on the message (i.e., the patient/Theme) rather than the addressee (i.e., the target person/Goal); thus it is incompatible with the construction. To confirm this view, Wierzbicka provides the following supports.

- (6) a. The prime minister announced his resignation.
- b. \* The prime minister told his resignation.
- (7) a. She told them about it.
- b. \* She announced them about it.

(Wierzbicka 1988: 373)

Firstly, the addressee can be deleted in the case of *announce*, which suggests that this

verb does not focus on the addressee as much as it does on the message. With *tell*, on the other hand, we cannot delete the message freely. Secondly, in the case of *tell*, but not *announce*, the message can be demoted from a direct object to an oblique phrase. This also supports that the message occurring with *announce* is viewed as important. And finally, Wierzbicka points out that *announce* usually requires a message important enough to be known by everyone, but *tell* is compatible with a trivial one. Based on these supports, she concludes that the two verbs differ as to what they mainly focus on (that is, whether Goal or Theme), and this difference crucially determines whether they can appear in the ditransitive construction, together with a hierarchy of interest. That is, although the ditransitive construction requires the addressee to be placed above the message in the hierarchy, it is incompatible with the meaning of the verb *announce*, which focuses highly on the message. Thus, Wierzbicka's criterion for the dativizability should be summarized as follows: only a verb that mainly focuses on the Goal rather than Theme can appear in the construction.

I basically agree with her in thinking that Goal is viewed as important than Theme in the ditransitive construction. We must, however, say that Wierzbicka's criterion is not based on sufficient evidence; she derives her conclusion only from the evidence shown in (6) and (7). In the following section, I will not only examine the collocational relation between a verb and the addressee/message in more detail but also provide some more evidence in order to support my claim. Wierzbicka's analysis is also insufficient in that she fails to explain subtle differences in acceptability observed among ditransitive sentences with speech-act verbs (note that the same can be said for Pinker's analysis). For example, some English native speakers judge ditransitive sentences with *shout* or *whisper* somewhat felicitous than those with *say*, but it is not clear how Wierzbicka explains this point within her approach. In order to capture the degree of acceptability among these verbs, she must explain that *shout* and *whisper* are more compatible with the construction, since they focus on the addressee more highly than *say* does. This explanation, however, seems not so convincing and difficult to prove. Furthermore, I will show that not all ditransitive sentences with *tell* are equally acceptable, which is also missed in Wierzbicka's analysis.

So far, I have reviewed two previous analyses and pointed out that they both fail to solve the problem of verb-by-verb choosiness sufficiently. We must not only predict a verb's dativizability correctly, but also explain subtle differences in acceptability of a ditransitive sentence with that verb. In the following, I will alternatively show that what distinguishes the three verbs (*tell*, *say*, and *shout*) is whether they lexicalize Goal, and this difference in goal-orientedness exactly

correspond to the dativizable/non-dativizable distinction. Besides, I will propose two other factors that are not directly associated with dativizability but affect acceptability of ditransitive sentences with speech-act verbs.

### 3. An Alternative Analysis

In this chapter, I will present my own analysis of speech-act verbs using the notion of goal-orientedness. Before proceeding, it is necessary to give some comments on the assumptions associated with my analysis. First of all, goal-orientedness can be defined as “the notion of whether or not a verb lexicalizes Goal of a transferred object,” or more loosely “the notion of whether or not Goal is necessarily evoked in the situation that a verb describes.” It is furthermore characterized as a feature involving “strong/weak” contrast, and verbs are classified into either “strongly goal-oriented verbs” or “weakly goal-oriented verbs,” according to their goal-orientedness.<sup>6</sup> Secondly, following Pinker (1989) and Gropen et al. (1989), I adopt the morphophonological constraints (see note 5) and assume that verbs like *announce* and *report* are excluded from the ditransitive construction because of these constraints. Finally, like most of the previous analyses, I also accept an assumption that communicative events are interpreted in terms of the “Conduit Metaphor” (cf. Reddy 1979, Lakoff and Johnson 1980). This metaphor implies that the speaker puts ideas or messages into words (like putting something into containers) and sends them along a conduit to the addressee. In this light, both concrete and metaphorical transfers are licensed via this metaphor, thus can be analyzed in parallel.

#### 3.1. Analyzing the Verbs in Terms of Goal-Orientedness

Let us begin by examining whether *tell*, *say*, and *shout* can occur only with the addressee or the message (that is, their “syntactic closeness” to the addressee/message) in much the same way as Wierzbicka, but in more detail. Consider first the syntax of *tell*.

- (8) a. Ellen told {Helen (elliptical)/\*to Helen}.
- b. \* Ellen told that the party would be tonight.
- c. Ellen told Helen that the party would be tonight.

As shown in (8a), *tell* can occur only with the addressee and moreover requires a direct object NP to refer to it. By contrast, the verb cannot occur with the message alone, as (8b) indicates (for the time being we deal with the message taking the form of *that*-

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<sup>6</sup> For the reason why I formalize this feature in terms of the “strong/weak” contrast, see Akashi (1999). Although I assume that there is a gradient in goal-orientedness, this assumption is not born out well by the data. Thus, it is sufficient to assume at this point a simple dichotomy (that is, the strong/weak contrast) for the purpose of this paper. A full definition of this notion is left for further study.



clauses only). From a comparison between (8b) and (8c), we can furthermore see that the message expressed by *that*-clauses cannot appear in the surface unless the addressee is syntactically expressed. In a word, *tell* requires the addressee, but not the message, to be obligatorily expressed in the surface.<sup>7</sup> If the addressee is obligatory in the syntax of the verb, we may as well think that it is subcategorized by the verb and should be involved in its core meaning. In this connection, recall Wierzbicka's claim in section 2.2 that *tell* highly focuses on the addressee rather than the message. This also suggests that the verb is strongly associated with the addressee in its semantics. Then, together with Wierzbicka's analysis, the observation above shows that *tell* is both syntactically and semantically "close" to the addressee rather than the message.<sup>8</sup> Thus, I tentatively conclude that the verb lexicalizes Goal, and should be classified into strongly-goal oriented verbs.

Let us next move on to the verb *say*. Consider the following sentences:

- (9) a. \*Ellen said {Helen/to Helen}.  
 b. Ellen said to Helen that the party would be tonight.  
 c. Ellen said that the party would be tonight.

Sentence (9a) shows that *say* cannot simply co-occur with the addressee alone, since it does not allow the addressee to take either the direct object NP form or the *to*-PP one. Note, however, that the addressee is allowed to appear in the surface only when the message is overtly expressed, as shown in (9b). By contrast, we can see from (9c) that the verb occurs with the message freely and does not necessarily require the addressee to be present in the surface. It follows from this observation that *say* requires the message, but not the addressee, to be obligatorily expressed in the surface, and this suggests that the verb is strongly associated with the message in its syntax. The syntactic behavior of *say* is certainly in harmony with Wierzbicka's claim that *announce* focuses on the message rather than the addressee (*say* and *announce* are

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<sup>7</sup> One can of course omit the addressee if it could be inferred from the context. But this is not our present concern. Also, there are some examples like *He told a story*, where the addressee need not be expressed overtly. I will deal with this case later.

<sup>8</sup> The following examples also seem to support our analysis.

- (i) a. I cannot really tell the difference between them.  
 b. Twenty-five years all told..

(Dirven et al. 1982: 156, 157)

The above examples do not convey communicative sense but rather can be paraphrased as *make out* and *count* respectively. These uses of *tell* are not our present concern; they are simply different from *tell* as a speech-act verb. However, what is important here is that the addressee is not obligatory in the syntax of *tell* when the verb is not used as a speech-act verb. This is also true for its semantics; we do not usually imagine the addressee when we make out or count something. Thus, from these examples, we may say that *tell* is strongly associated with the addressee whenever it is used as a speech-act verb (see also Dirven et al. 1989: 155-158).





the event, as shown in (13b). Note here that *mumble* is classified into verbs of manner of speaking, and this verb can also take *to*-PPs that does not refer to the addressee. These arguments confirm the assumption I made above. That is, *say* and *shout* do not imply the addressee in their lexical semantics, and sentences with these verbs come to bear communicative sense only when *to*-PPs accompany the verbs. As for this conclusion, one might object that we cannot explain why the sentences in (11) allow communicative sense, given that the verbs do not imply Goal and the addressee is not overtly expressed in these sentences. I suspect, however, that this is because our background knowledge about speech act is at work in these cases. That is, we usually think that there must be some reason for speaking out loud; if there is no intention of conveying some message to the others, we need not speak aloud. In this light, it is not surprising that one tries to interpret the situations expressed in (11) communicatively, if he/she can imagine natural contexts for them. To sum, although Wierzbicka seems correct in pointing out that *say* focuses on the message rather than the addressee (similar comments are made in Dirven et al. 1982, Izutsu 2000, Tobin 1993), I further claim that *say* and *shout* crucially differ from *tell* in that they do not lexicalize Goal and thus should be classified into weakly goal-oriented verbs.

Another piece of evidence that supports our claim comes from the following examples:

- (14) a. Adam told quite a good joke in the empty room.
- b. Adam said his name (aloud) in the empty room.
- c. Adam shouted curses in the empty room.

The phrase *in the empty room* indicates that there is no person in the room, thus no addressee too.<sup>9</sup> If the assumption at issue is correct, we expect (14a) to be infelicitous in contrast with (14b) and (14c); *tell* implies the presence of the addressee, but this implication conflicts with the “empty room” situation. However, my informant judged the sentences in (14) all acceptable. At first sight, it appears that this judgement poses a serious problem for our claim, but a closer examination reveals that this is not the case. To start with, it is generally said that the indirect object can be omitted when *tell* takes certain NPs (e.g., *a joke*, *a story*, *a lie*, *the truth*, *the time*, etc). Thus, the sentence *Adam told quite a good joke* is perfectly acceptable, but it is important to note here that the presence of the addressee is entailed even if the addressee is not expressed overtly (cf. Dirven et al. 1982: 144). This is supported by the following observation. According to Verspoor (1997), sentence (15a) has the

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<sup>9</sup> One might think here that the speaker can be also regarded as the addressee, since we can actually speak aloud to ourselves or hear our own voice as a result of saying or shouting. But I do not take this possibility into consideration here.

implication shown in (15b).

- (15) a. Adam told a story.  
 b.  $\models \exists x \mid$  Adam told a story to  $x$

(Verspoor 1997: 70).

Then, it follows from (15) that if one judges (14a) acceptable, the only possible interpretation for this sentence is that Adam was imagining an audience in his mind and making a joke as if someone were present. Interestingly, my informant in fact interpreted the sentence in this way. For example, she pointed out to me that she can only use sentence (14a) to describe unusual situations such as the following: Adam was captured (by the police, or a kidnapper) and placed in an empty room and left there for some hours. Being frightened and under stress, he told a joke to himself or an imaginary addressee to lift his spirits. In this case, the addressee is evoked in the imaginary world, since the empty room situation forces it not to be present in the actual world. Again, what is crucial is that English native speakers try to create situations in which the addressee is involved when they interpret sentences with *tell*. As for (14b) and (14c), on the other hand, *say* and *shout* can describe a situation such as Adam was speaking out alone in the empty room, and in this case the addressee need not be evoked either in the actual or imaginary world. We can effectively explain the difference in the interpretations between (14a) and the other two sentences if we assume that *tell* lexicalizes Goal, whereas *say* and *shout* do not.

So far, I have offered some pieces of evidence in order to support our claim and they all seem to bear it out well. Therefore, it may be safe to conclude that the verbs we have dealt with differ as to goal-orientedness. The verb *tell* lexicalizes Goal and thus should be classified into strongly goal-oriented verbs. As for this verb, the addressee is involved in the core meaning of the verb, and the syntactic frame of *tell* requires us to make it explicit. The verbs *say* and *shout* by contrast do not lexicalize Goal and thus should be classified into weakly goal-oriented verbs. The addressee can certainly exist in the event described by these verbs, but I assume that this is due to the appearance of *to*-PPs and our background knowledge. In view of this difference, let us now consider the problem of verb-by-verb choosiness. It is interesting to note that the verb classification above in terms of goal-orientedness exactly corresponds to the dativizable/non-dativizable distinction of the verbs in question. In this respect, we may say that goal-orientedness works as a criterion. That is, given that only verbs belonging to strongly goal-oriented verbs can participate in the dative alternation, it is correctly predict that *tell* is a dativizable verb, whereas *say*, and *shout* non-dativizable verbs. To put it more concretely, *say* and *shout* fail to satisfy this criterion and excluded from the ditransitive construction, since they are classified into weakly goal-

oriented verbs. The verb *tell*, on the other hand, can occur in the construction since it is classified into strongly goal-oriented verbs. Based on the discussion so far, I argue that the notion of goal-orientedness works as a decisive criterion in deciding whether a verb can participate into the dative alternation.

### 3.2. *Other Factors Affecting Acceptability of Ditransitive Sentences*

As I argued in the previous section, dativizability of a verb is certainly determined by goal-orientedness. It seems, however, that acceptability of a ditransitive sentence as a whole cannot be explained solely by this notion. Taking this point into consideration, I will introduce two factors in the following subsections: "actor-orientedness" and "informativity of the message." Although these factors do not determine a verb's dativizability, they affect acceptability of a ditransitive sentence including that verb.

#### 3.2.1. *Analyzing the Verbs in Terms of Actor-Orientedness*

Within my framework, verbs such as *say* and *shout* are classified into weakly goal-oriented verbs, and it is thus predicted that they are equally incompatible with the ditransitive construction. But the fact, however, is that there exists a subtle difference in acceptability among these verbs. As I mentioned in section 2.2, some English native speakers judge that ditransitive sentences with *shout* or *whisper* are slightly more felicitous than those with *say*. Green (1974) also gives the following examples, which are perfectly acceptable at least in her dialect.

- (16) a. He whispered her words of encouragement.
- b. He shouted her the instruction.

(Green 1974: 89)

Moreover, there seem to be some situations in which acceptability improves.

- (17) a. \*??? Susan shouted Rachel the news.
- b. Facing each other with a river between, John shouted Mary his words of love.

Although my informant judged that (17a) is quite infelicitous (but not completely unacceptable), she said that ditransitive sentences with *shout* are more acceptable in a case such as (17b). As for (17), the improvement in acceptability can be simply explained as being due to our background knowledge; we usually think it is natural to shout in order to convey a message in the situation described in (17b). However, the question of why Green judged the sentences in (16) to be acceptable is remained unanswered, since we cannot easily tell whether they describe proper situations for shouting or whispering unless some contexts are supplied. In this respect, the explanation above seems to be correct, but not sufficient to cover a wider range of data. Then, how can we explain the fact that some English native speakers draw a

distinction between *say* and *shout/whisper* in their acceptability with the ditransitive construction? <sup>10</sup>

For a possible answer to this question, let us examine the three verbs and see whether we can find some semantic differences among them. First of all, it is worth mentioning that *shout* and *whisper* are different from *say* in that they are passivizable when they are not interpreted communicatively (cf. Zwicky 1971). The verb *say* by contrast can be passivized (although most native speakers seem to think of (18b) as somewhat stilted).

- (18) a.?? "Shut up" was whispered (at them) by Susan.

(Levin 1993: 205)

- b. "Glop" was said to us by an onlooker.

(Zwicky 1971: 232)

Note also that *shout* and *whisper* allow impersonal passives, whereas *say* does not (sentence (19a) is cited from Levin 1993: 205).

- (19) a. \* It is whispered that the winter would be announced tonight.

- b. It is said that the winter would be announced tonight.

Roughly saying, the passive alternation cuts off Actor (a person who performs an action denoted by a verb) from the event described by a transitive verb (the same is true for impersonal passives). Then, the fact that *shout* and *whisper* do not allow either options suggests that the verbs strongly evoke Actor, and for this reason they cannot cut off Actor from the events. The following examples further confirm this view.

- (20) a. The Church says that we should pray for God at least once a day.

- b. \*??? The Church shouts/whispers that we should pray for God at least once a day.

- (21) a. The television says that it is going to rain tomorrow.

- b. \*??? The television shouts/whispers that it is going to rain tomorrow.

Although (20a) and (21a) are figurative expressions, these sentences show that *say* can take non-animate subjects as well as animate ones. On the other hand, we cannot use *shout* and *whisper* in the same context, as shown in (20b) and (21b). Assuming that *shout* and *whisper* are strongly associated with Actor, we can explain why these verbs cannot take non-animate subjects in the sentences above. Another difference between *shout/whisper* and *say* is that the former encodes a certain manner of the

<sup>10</sup> As for the sentences in (16), one possible reason for the improvement in acceptability may be that they can be paraphrased into ditransitive sentences including verbs such as *give* and *tell* (for example, *He gave/told her a word of encouragement by whispering*). That is, those who judge the

action, whereas the latter does not. As for *shout* and *whisper*, it is generally agreed that these verbs belong to manner of speaking verbs and imply that the action denoted by each verb is done in some manner. As for *say*, on the other hand, we can easily agree that the verb lexicalizes no salient manner from the fact that we can say something in different manners (for example, shouting or whispering). Since the manner of *shouting* or *whispering* is about the "speaker's" manner, we may say that *shout* and *whisper* differs from *say* in that they contain information which strongly evokes Actor.<sup>11</sup> On the basis of the discussion above, I claim that an important difference among these three verbs is whether they have semantic properties that strongly evoke Actor in the event they describe. In order to capture this difference, I introduce another notion which I call "actor-orientedness." I refer to verbs that strongly evoke Actor as "strongly actor-oriented verbs" and those do not as "weakly actor-oriented verbs," assuming that verbs differ as to the degree of actor-orientedness. Then, we can classify these verbs in terms of actor-orientedness: *shout* and *whisper* are classified into strongly actor-oriented verbs, whereas *say* into weakly actor-oriented verbs. With this classification in mind, let us now return to the question I have pointed out previously. To account for the degree of variability in acceptability, I assume that actor-orientedness also works as a criterion. That is, strongly actor-oriented verbs are regarded as more compatible with the ditransitive construction,

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sentences acceptable might interpret the sentences according to the paraphrases.

<sup>11</sup> Although we can distinguish *say* from *shout* and *whisper* according to whether a verb encodes a manner, the proposal here should call for a further refinement, for not all ditransitive sentences containing manner of speaking verbs are compatible with the construction. For example, consider the following sentences:

- (i) a. ? He {shouted/whispered} her a few words.
- b. \*/?? He {mumbled/muttered} her a few words.

The contrast above shows the difference in acceptability among ditransitive sentences with manner of speaking verbs. To capture this difference, I tentatively assume that although manner of speaking verbs basically encode manners, in the case of *shout* and *whisper* their manners can be reinterpreted as means of the action (cf. Green 1974). This reinterpretation is guaranteed by paraphrased expressions such as the following.

- (ii) a. Using a whisper, he gave her a word of encouragement.
- b. Using a shout(ing voice), he told her the instructions.

(Green 1974: 89)

- (iii) a. He gave her a word of encouragement by whispering.
- b. He told her instructions by shouting.

Granting this assumption, it follows that as for manner of speaking verbs, a verb is regarded as more compatible with the ditransitive construction when its manner can be reinterpreted as a means of the action described by the verb. Then, we might say that *mumble* and *mutter* are less compatible with the construction, since their manners cannot be reinterpreted as means. Note that this assumption does not conflict with the proposal presented here, since *say* does not seem to encode a manner nor a means. I cannot tell at this moment whether there are more verbs that allow this reinterpretation other than *shout* and *whisper*. A closer examination of manner of speaking verbs in terms of this point is needed to establish the validity of this assumption.



compared with weakly actor-oriented verbs.

Adopting the criteria based on goal-orientedness and actor-orientedness, we are now ready to explain the difference in acceptability among ditransitive sentences including the speech-act verbs we have dealt with. Firstly, *tell* is completely compatible with the ditransitive construction, since it is classified into strongly goal-oriented verbs and thus satisfies the criterion based on goal-orientedness. The verbs *say* and *shout*, on the other hand, fail to satisfy the criterion, since they are classified into weakly goal-oriented verbs. For this reason most English native speakers judge that these verbs cannot participate in the alternation. In this light, we may say that a verb's dativizability is determined by goal-orientedness. Let us next move on to *say*. It follows from the analysis here that this verb cannot occur in the construction to start with, since it does not satisfy either of the criteria. In fact, no English native speakers seem to allow this verb to enter into the construction. In other words, verbs which belong to the weak versions of both goal-orientedness and actor-orientedness are completely excluded from the dative construction. Lastly, let us make a brief examination of *shout* and *whisper*. Note that these verbs, as opposed to *say*, are not completely excluded from the construction; acceptability of ditransitive sentences with *shout* or *whisper* differ among speakers. For those who strictly judge acceptability based on goal-orientedness, it might be that they predict without question that these verbs do not occur in the ditransitive construction. But those who do not lay weight on this notion to such an extent may think that *shout* and *whisper* are somewhat acceptable when used ditransitively, since these verbs satisfy the criterion based on actor-orientedness. That is, I claim that the class of weakly goal-oriented verbs will be acceptable to some extent, if they are classified into strongly actor-oriented verbs.

### 3.2.2. *Informativity of the Message*

I have previously argued that the verb *tell* is allowed to enter into the ditransitive construction since it belongs to strongly goal-oriented verbs and thus satisfies the criterion based on goal-orientedness. As shown in the following examples, however, not all ditransitive sentences with *tell* are equally acceptable.

- (22) a. \*John told me "Oops!/Ouch!"  
       b. \*John told me (the word) "ouch." (Izutsu 2000: 42)  
       c. ?? John told me hello/good-bye.  
       d. John told me, "Leave the room."

The reason why (22a) and (22b) are ill-formed would be that they describe merely an utterance of a word, not a communicative event, since expressions like "oops" and "ouch" do not seem to have much informative content, and thus are regarded as not

worth conveying to someone.<sup>12</sup> This is also confirmed by the sentences (22c) and (22d), in which acceptability improves as the message becomes more informative (we can easily imagine that informativity increases as the message changes from a single word to a phrase expressing greetings, and finally to a full sentence). It follows from this observation that *tell* must not only satisfy the criterion based on goal-orientedness but also take an informative message as the direct object, in order to occur in the ditransitive construction. In this connection, note that *tell* requires informative messages even in prepositional-dative sentences. See the following examples:

- (23) a. \*John told "Oops!/Ouch!" to me.  
       b. ?? John told hello/good-bye to me.

As shown above, the verb requires informative messages when it is used in both ditransitive and prepositional-dative forms, which suggests that this requirement comes from the lexical meaning of the verb and cannot be attributed to the nature of the ditransitive construction. Taking this point into consideration, we may further claim that the requirement concerning informativity works as a necessary condition, and the one concerning goal-orientedness a sufficient condition. As I have argued before, goal-orientedness is relevant when the two forms alternate with each other, and imposes only on the ditransitive version the restriction that verbs occurring in this form must be strongly goal-oriented. But the requirement of informativity is relevant to both forms, and the verb must take an informative message whenever it is used as a speech-act verb. In this light, the sentences (22a) and (22c) are infelicitous, because they fail to satisfy the necessary condition to start with. Interestingly, *say* by contrast need not fulfill this requirement. Compare the sentences in (24) with those in (23).

- (24) a. John said "Oops!/Ouch!" to {me/the dentist}.  
       b. John said hello/goodbye to me.  
       c. Ellen said to me, "Leave the room."

What is important here is that *say* can take less informative messages, even if it is accompanied by *to*-PPs and the sentences convey communicative sense (my informant, however, pointed out that (24a) seems marginal since she could not easily imagine an appropriate situation for the sentence, but I think this is rather a pragmatic problem). Relatedly, Izutsu (2000) offers the following examples and claims that the message expressed as the direct object of *say* must not be so voluminous. This further suggests that *say* is less compatible with informative messages, compared with *tell*.

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<sup>12</sup> Here, I judge whether a message is informative or not rather intuitively. Roughly speaking, *wh*- or *that*-complement clauses and direct quotations are regarded as informative, since they seem to carry some semantic content. On the other hand, a single word, phrase, and sound are considered to

- (25) a. I want you to {\*say/tell} all the details.  
 b. He {?said/told} the story.

(Izutsu 2000: 43)

Based on the observation above, it seems correct that *tell* and *say* differ as to whether they are sensitive to informativity of the message, and this very factor affects acceptability of ditransitive sentences with *tell*, even though the verb is classified into a strongly goal-oriented verb. However, there still remains an important question: why must *tell* obligatorily require an informative message, whereas *say* need not?

In order to give an answer to this question, it is worth comparing the verbs *say* and *utter*. First of all, note that these verbs take similar NPs referring to the message.

- (26) a. Ellen said {a few words/something/her name/a prayer}.  
 b. For decades, Arafat and other Arab leaders would not even utter the word Israel.  
 c. Why?' Troy was about to utter something hastily; he then checked himself and said, 'I am too poor.'

(Time September 20, 1993)

(*Far From the Madding Crowd*, Thomas Hardy)

- d. Her coaches, Evy and Mary Scotvold, refused to utter Baiul's name at a postcontest press conference.

(Time March 7, 1994)

We can also find the expression *utter a prayer* in *The Kenkyusha Dictionary of English Collocations*. Now, the verb *utter* seems to involve in its semantics the action of enunciating some words or phrases. This is confirmed by the following examples, which suggest that the verb can take even sounds that have no semantic content to convey.

- (27) a. Sam opened his mouth, then quickly shut it again without uttering a sound.  
 b. He uttered a snorting laugh...

(COBUILD 1)

(COBUILD 2)

As shown in (28), the verb is by contrast less compatible with *that*-clauses and direct quotations, which are considered to be more informative since they constitute a proposition.

- (28) a.?? The teacher uttered that I should study harder.  
 b.?? The teacher uttered, "Study harder."

From this observation, we may well think that *utter* focuses on "the enunciation of a sound, word or phrase."<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, I assume that *say* has a similar meaning to

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be less informative or not informative at all.

<sup>13</sup> One might argue that *utter* in fact takes a direct object such as *thought* or *opinion*, which seem to have some content. But my informant said that the expression *utter one's thought* is quite felicitous, for the reason I cite above. This indicates that for some speakers *utter* is used strictly to describe enunciation of a sound or word.

that of *utter*, since it can take similar object NPs referring to the message. This assumption is further supported by the following example, in which *say* takes an object NP referring to a sound.

- (29) and the one stroking her breast was saying 'Mnnn' with a very sensual relish.

(Dirven et al. 1982: 94)

Another piece of evidence comes from Dirven et al. (1982). They point out that the sentence *I said nothing* can be paraphrased as both *I uttered no sound* and *I expressed no content*. This also suggests that *say* can take both a message with semantic content and a mere sound as the direct object. Recall also the sentences with *say* in (11), which describe situations where the addressee need not be necessarily involved. From the discussion so far, it is probably safe to conclude that the assumption is correct and the basic sense of these two verbs should be defined as "the enunciation of a sound or word(s)." Concerning this conclusion, one might argue that these verbs in fact have communicative sense when they are used in the preposition-dative form (for example, *I said a few words to him*). I certainly agree on this point, but claim that in this case a semantic extension occurs in the lexical meanings of the verbs. That is, although the verbs *say* and *utter* do not lexically have communicative sense, their lexical meanings extend when they are combined with *to*-PPs, in such a way that the combination expresses communicative sense. Thus, it can be said that *to*-PPs trigger the semantic extension in the meaning of these verbs. Note that this idea fits in with my proposal that *say* belongs to weakly goal-oriented verbs. Given that *say* does not have communicative sense in its inherent semantics, it follows that the verb does not lexicalize Goal. Then, my point is that it is only when the verb is accompanied by *to*-PPs that the verb has the extended use and comes to focus on the addressee.

Let us now turn to the verb *tell*. The fact that *tell* obligatorily requires an informative message may be accountable if we consider that the verb lexically implies "transfer of messages/ideas." It is natural to think that one must convey messages informative enough to achieve communications with others. Note that *tell* makes a sharp contrast with *say* in this respect (as I have argued above, *say* does not lexically have communicative sense). In fact, the difference between the two verbs is reflected in their definitions given by *COBUILD*.

- (30) a. If someone **tells** something, they give you some information.  
 b. If you **tell** something such as joke, a story, or your personal experiences, you communicate it to other people using speech.  
 c. When you **say** something, you speak words.

(*COBUILD* 2)

Furthermore, it is well known that the two verbs both take the same NP, i.e., name, but the meanings conveyed by them are totally different. Consider the following:

- (31) a. Please tell me your name. (I want to know it.)  
 b. Please say your name to me. (I want to hear how it is pronounced.)  
 (Dirven et al. 1982: 134)

As we can see from the paraphrases in the brackets, when the NP *name* co-occurs with *tell*, it refers to information about the identity of the addressee. In the case of *say*, on the other hand, its sound aspects are focused. This observation crucially supports my claim that *tell* implies “transfer of messages/ideas” whereas *say* “the enunciation of a sound or word(s).”

Now I am ready to answer the question why *tell* obligatorily requires an informative message, whereas *say* need not. This is because the inherent semantics of the former has communicative sense and thus is sensitive to informativity of the message. In the case of *say*, the verb certainly describes a communicative event, but this is not due to its lexical meaning; rather the verb gets communicative sense via a semantic extension. In short, *tell* and *say* differ as to whether they lexically have communicative sense or not, and this very difference is responsible for informativity of messages they take.

#### 4. Conclusion

In this paper, we discussed the problem of verb-by-verb choosiness in the dative alternation. To solve this problem, I examined some speech-act verbs and argued that a verb’s dativizability is basically determined by goal-orientedness. I claimed that goal-orientedness works as the primary criterion as to dativizability, and that only verbs belonging to strongly goal-oriented verbs can participate in the alternation. Adopting this criterion, we can correctly predict that *tell* is classified into dativizable verbs whereas *say*, *shout* and *whisper* into non-dativizable verbs. To capture a subtle difference in acceptability among weakly goal-oriented verbs (i.e., non-dativizable verbs), I further introduced Actor-Orientedness, which is the notion of whether a verb positively evokes Actor. Although this notion does not directly affect dativizability, actor-orientedness works as a supplementary criterion, which explains why there exists a certain degree of acceptability among verbs that fail to satisfy the criterion based on goal-orientedness. I further claimed that informativity of the message is also responsible for acceptability of ditransitive sentences. Since speech-act verbs describe communicative events, they require the message to be informative in the first place, independently of the problem of verb-by-verb choosiness. Thus, acceptability of a ditransitive sentence is not solely affected by a verb’s lexical properties (that is,

goal-orientedness and actor-orientedness). We must also consider the nature of messages which a verb takes, in order to explain the whole story of the dative alternation as for speech-act verbs.

Finally, I must mention that the approach adopted here is useful for clearing up the same problem with verbs which I call "caused-motion verbs."<sup>14</sup> In Akashi (1999), I have examined some caused-motion verbs and concluded that goal-orientedness correctly predicts dativizability for these verbs together with actor-orientedness. Thus, at least for caused-motion verbs and speech-act verbs, my approach is on the right track and gives a comprehensive explanation. This enlarges the possibility that goal-orientedness and actor-orientedness play an important role in solving the problem of verb-by-verb choosiness in the dative alternation.

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<sup>14</sup> Within my approach, these verbs describe the event in which the actor argument directly causes the theme argument to move along a path or to a certain goal. The verbs I dealt with in that thesis are the following: *give, bring, take, roll, throw, kick, carry, drag, pull, push, and move*.

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